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ABSTRACT

Academics remain deeply uncertain and divided about their role as practitioners of multiculturalism, inclusion and diversity. As teachers of writing, academics try to offer their students the freedom to express themselves, but they continue to puzzle over how they are to integrate and achieve true inclusion in the classroom. A series of informal interviews with college faculty documents more specifically the nature of this troubling confusion. Five main questions were asked, which revealed the following results. First, among faculty there is little consensus about what the terms multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity mean. Of the respondents, 40% thought the terms were interchangeable. Second, all the respondents agreed that racism and sexism continue to exist among student populations but on a less overt level than in previous decades. Some faculty interviewed expressed a reluctance to respond directly to racism or sexism in the classroom; they prefer to stay neutral in classroom situations. Third, most faculty do not see signs of overt racism in the composition classroom probably because students recognize that it is politically incorrect. Fourth, 53% denied having seen any discrimination on the administrative level. One male professor complained of reverse discrimination; all other complaints came from women or minorities. Fifth, faculty rely primarily on their reading lists to further the goals of multiculturalism, inclusion and diversity. (TB)

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Pedagogical Reality

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## Pedagogical Reality

In The Making of Knowledge, Stephen North calls for continued input from Practitioners, yet the pedagogical aspects of Composition Studies continue to be undervalued. We play with the accepted jargon and gamely attempt to legitimize teaching, yet we always seem to fall short and are left standing alone murmuring "diversity," "inclusion," "empowerment," . . . . As teachers of writing, we offer our students the freedom to express themselves, but we continue to puzzle over how we are to integrate and achieve true inclusion in our classroom.

In the ideal academic world, the current emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity has resulted in less intolerance, bigotry, and prejudice. In fact, there is the belief that we have come so far in recognizing minorities that the white male has become the victim of reverse discrimination. Certainly more overt attempts to overcome prejudice of any kind riddle college campuses across the United States. But, I am concerned that we, as academicians, have become so personally involved in the fight for equality that we are declaring the battle won when we have only captured a few key objectives.

To determine whether I was being overly pessimistic in my analysis of the status of multiculturalism on the average college campus, I conducted a survey which asked professors at a variety of learning institutions across the United States numerous questions concerning the integration and implementation of multiculturalism in their writing courses. The responses were, shall I say, "diverse" and not necessarily what I anticipated.

The first, and most basic, question was: "What do we, as academicians, mean by our current use of the words multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion?" My motivation for beginning the survey with this question was a secret fear I had that these terms have been commonly and casually tossed around America academia in recent years without ever being restricted to a universal definition. Considering the importance we are placing on the implications of these words, this ambiguity worried me. I was surprised to find that just under ten percent of the respondents felt uncomfortable with the wording of this question. They did not want to speak as a part of a larger community. One person admitted: "I've no understanding of a larger consensus on the meaning of [these] terms in the academic community."

Those that did answer were often meticulous in their definitions. Multiculturalism was typically defined as the deemphasizing of the "western, white, male civilization." Note the emphasis on the majority in defining the very term which supposedly emphasizes the minority. The most interesting aspect to this first question was that almost 40% thought these three terms (multiculturalism, diveristy, and inclusion) were interchangeable. Audrey Wick, a Ph.D. Candidate from the University of Texas at Arlington, laments: "I must not be interpreting this well--all these terms mean roughly the same thing to me." One often noted caveat was that "inclusion" refers to gender issues as well as ethnic and cultural ones. Keith

Peterson, responding from the diverse population of Brigham Young University Hawaiian Campus, chides "Discussions of inclusion should not limit themselves to questions of race or gender, but should also bring in questions of preparation." The most cynical definitions included viewing multiculturalism as "pretending that Western culture is not really a superior culture in terms of its values" and as seeing the use of the term "inclusion" merely as an example of academic jargon.

The responses to this question confirmed that while calls for papers regarding multiculturalism are zooming across the United States by the hundreds, we remain relatively uncertain of their meaning. The primary implication of this ambiguity is that we may be endorsing and teaching something we think is multiculturalism when in actuality it is not. If this is the case, superficial treatments of various minority texts may be wrongly viewed as endorsing a multicultural emphasis.

The second question was "Have you seen (and/or continue to see) racist or sexist attitudes displayed by your students? To what degree? And how do you respond to such situations?" All respondents agreed that racist and sexist attitudes still exist but on a less overt level. Sexism was seen by most female instructors as a continued problem, and women were the only ones to note that the students questioned their authority. Most teachers admitted to feeling uncomfortable when called on to respond to overt sexism or racism. They preferred to stay neutral, asking challenging questions when appropriate, but

trying to respect their students' opinions. Bob Donahoo explains his response:

> I have tried to respond by challenging the ideas with questions and enabling students to see alternatives to their racist/sexist ideas. Though, like Woody Allen in one of his movies, I often feel the best response is a baseball bat and a well-aimed brick, I try to respect my students' rights to their beliefs, even ones I abhor.

The answers to this question confirm that both students and teachers continue to feel somewhat uncomfortable with racist or sexist issues and that prejudice, though less blatant, still exists.

Question three continued question number two by asking if prejudice is a problem specifically in the writing classroom and, if so, how. Twenty-five percent of the respondents said "no" with one explaining, "I've not seen much of it in my own classes, but I have to admit that I try to stay away from topics that might reveal it." One professor admits that she does not hear overtly racist comments, but her almost all white classes "might, though, ignore blacks to death." Overall, the conclusion is that "overt" racism, perhaps because it is not "politically correct," is rarely seen. As I stated at the beginning of this paper, this is one of my main areas of concern. I fear that since discrimination is no longer politically correct, students hide it. As teachers, we often optimistically assume the prejudice is

gone when it has simply gone underground. The problem with this scenario, of course, is that thinking we have effectively dealt with this issue, we move on; the students are then left with their hidden prejudices and bias.

Fifty-three percent of the respondents denied having "experienced or seen any prejudice at the administrative level" which was question number four. One white male respondent explained, "I think female faculty members are more likely to have experienced it than a male" while another claimed,

> It is a normal thing for universities to discriminate against white males. For an example, see the December MLA Job List that features ads urging members of "protected groups" to apply for positions. Clearly, some groups get "extra" points over other groups. I see this as institutional racism.

Other than this one male, only female professors acknowledged they had seen prejudice at the administrative level. One woman simply wrote, "You expect us to answer this?" while another explained that a female, African-American colleague of hers was always expected to represent her race which seemed unfair and prejudicial. One respondant, openly admitting she feared reprisal if her university knew of her answer, questioned the acceptance and inclusion of female professors citing instances of "male faculty members, the Dean included, 'retelling' what female faculty suggests. . . . No one is careless enough to make 'legal' mistakes--but then most prejudice is not illegal."

While no one would disagree that administrations are being forced to overcome discrepancies in their hiring practices, "fair" or "equal" representations of faculty members rare. In spite of the fact that "just two percent of faculty at predominantly white colleges and universities are African-American [and] just ten percent of all tenured faculty are women which Bernice Sandler points out has stayed the same for the last decade," reverse discrimination is being felt by white males (Daniels 17). In recent years, this view has become more and more popular which could threaten the continued hiring and promotion of minorities.

Not surprisingly, over ninety percent of those surveyed agreed that "prejudice remains a concern as we approach the twenty-first century" (question number six). One professor questioned, "Why bother to ask?" while another explained, "Overt racism is now socially unacceptable. Un-self-conscious racism, racism with a smiling face, is however, sadly the norm." Forty percent of the respondents emphasized the continued, and growing, prejudice and discrimination against African-Americans. They were especially concerned about the potential violence associated with this prejudice as the white European tradition is continually questioned. This traditionally powerful segment of society is threatened with the loss of their identity and are feeling confined by the required "politically correct" actions and thoughts required of them. In effect, the survey revealed that the reaction of some white males to the inclusion of

minorities, specifically African Americans, seems to be increasingly bitter and hostile. They feel threatened and excluded. One respondent explains, "The current trend toward the 'politically correct' may even exacerbate [this problem] whenever meaningful discussions of problems [ or issues such as effectiveness of Affirmative Action] is cut off." To overcome this tendency toward reverse discrimination, Beth Battles cautions that "one culture cannot be seen as 'superior' to another" which could lead to the same separatism we saw earlier in this century. One respondent identified the paradox inherent in teaching multiculturalism: "the more we attempt to make courses 'multicultural', the more we consciously draw attention to the 'differences' among cultures." The response to this question confirms my fear that prejudice, although less common and much less overt, will continue to be a problem in the next century.

In response to the last question of the survey, "How do you attempt to achieve 'inclusion,' 'diversity,' and 'multiculturalism' in your classroom," almost all respondents revealed that they rely almost completely on readings written by and/or about minorities. Most instructors have a "reading list [that is] varied by age, gender, race, and socioeconomics," but several caution that they emphasize the author's skill as a writer rather than stressing the author's background. There are definite exceptions to this type of inclusion though. One professor readily admits she purposely seeks to provoke and to

have the students question why she provokes as they discuss larger political questions. Conversely, another professor acknowledges including various texts, but says he tries "to avoid teaching essays and stories that bash white people, European culture, America, and capitalism."

The responses to this last question resurrected my fears that had been partially alleviated by the responses to the other questions. The extreme reliance on readings alone combined with the professors' uncertainty about their own role as teachers of writing reflects the fact that we, as active Practitioners, remain uncertain of both our goals and our means for attaining these goals in the writing classroom. We do not share common definitions for such key terms as "multiculturalism," "diversity," and "inclusion," nor are we totally comfortable with our role as writing teachers within the context of multiculturalism. We seem to agree that prejudice is less "overt," but we also acknowledge an ever-present, latent prejudice that continues to exist not only with our students but, in some cases, with our administrations. Does this mean, then, that multiculturalism is not working? That it is failing to acknowledge the legitimacy of minority voices? Not necessarily.

Alexander W. Astin's recent study indicates that Institutional, Faculty, and Student Diversity Emphasis does positively influence students. Students who attend schools which emphasize diversity tend to be more satisfied with college life, more committed to environmental issues, more interested in

leadership roles, more culturally active, and less materialistic (47). These students also seem to benefit from increased cognitive and affective development (47). A cynic might argue, though, that those students who choose to attend a liberal arts college are more naturally inclined toward these tenets. Until further studies are completed, the effectiveness of multiculturalism will remain questionable.

In teaching writing courses that emphasize multiculturalism and stress inclusion, we, as Practitioners, are attempting to overcome the unseen barriers which separate people. I believe that any attempt on our part to do this will be positive, but I also believe we must be cautious in evaluating our progress. We can not yet declare victory over prejudice and discrimination. As one of my freshmen explained, "Our world isn't free of prejudice, it just has less discrimination."

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